



Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 11 Number 3 April 2014

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 20th April 2014: Mrugavani National Park (Chilkur Deer Park). Meeting point: Punjagutta Crossroads, 6.00AM.

Chilkur is located around 25km from the city and is home to a lot of woodland birds. Keep a lookout for the Asian Paradise-flycatcher and other scrub forest birds. The Blue-faced Malkoha and the Pied Crested Cuckoo are also usually seen here.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

**INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Dr Ajay Gaur on 'Wildlife Conservation using Genetic Approach'
Tuesday, 15th April 2014, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)**

Dr Ajay Gaur is a Senior Scientist and Project Leader at Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Species (LaCONES), an annex of Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology. His areas of research interest are Conservation Genetics and Molecular Ecology of endangered species, especially Indian big cats, ungulates and reptiles.

Dr Gaur's group focuses on the development and application of molecular markers in conservation genetics of endangered species. The major efforts are towards the use of non-invasive sampling protocols and development of species-specific DNA markers to look into the genetic structure of existing populations.

Large wild populations of several species have become small and fragmented due to habitat loss, geographical fragmentation and other manmade factors. Small populations face greater demographic and genetic risks. Conservation genetics deals with genetic management of small fragmented populations, resolving taxonomic uncertainties and the use of molecular genetic analysis in forensics and understanding of species biology.

Report – HSBC Bird Race, 2nd March 2014

Shafaat Ulla



Photo courtesy: Humayun Taher

The Bird Races sponsored by HSBC have become very popular annual events and are being held in fifteen cities all over the country. This was the fifth race that BSAP had organized, and

the third one jointly with Great Hyderabad Adventure Club (GHAC). As in the previous races, there was overwhelming response this year also and it was a great success.

The Chief Guest this year was Mr. Jayesh Ranjan, VC & MD, APIIC Ltd. In all, **87** persons participated in **23** teams. The teams were flagged off by Mr. Ranjan at 7.00AM from Hotel Haritha Plaza, Begumpet. Each team was given a log book to note down the birds seen, along with a breakfast hamper for each participant. This year we decided to skip the National Parks and ICRISAT, to avoid having to take permissions etc. The teams therefore went far and wide to newer places, which according to most, was very challenging and enjoyable.

The teams returned to the hotel in the evening and submitted their log books to the judges for scrutiny, and then got busy helping themselves to tea and cookies, which they probably needed very badly. It was interesting to see participants animatedly discussing and comparing notes and trying to identify birds from the photos that they had taken.



Aasheesh Pittie with the judges
(Photo: P Ram Babu)



Mr Jayesh Ranjan addressing the gathering
(Photo courtesy: Humayun Taher)

While the judges, Ramakrishna Rao, Moorthy and Humayun, were busy with their work, Mr. Ranjan addressed the gathering, followed by Mr. Aritro Mukherjee, Vice-President, Wealth Management & Retail Banking, HSBC.



A section of the audience
(Photo courtesy: Humayun Taher)



Mr Jayesh Ranjan with the winning team
(Photo courtesy: Humayun Taher)

After this, each team was invited to come up to the dais and talk about their experiences of the day. Dr. Vikramjit regaled the audience with his funny anecdotes and kept the audience in splits. There was drama too: Lawrence and his team had to wade into the water to rescue a duck that was caught in a snare! Some got totally lost and some got caught in traffic jams. Surjodeb and his partner had to hire an autorickshaw to complete the race as their captain got sick and had to retire, along with his car!

In the meantime, the judges completed their job and announced the winners based on the highest number of bird species seen:

PRIZE	TEAM	NO. OF SPECIES	BIRD OF THE DAY
FIRST	GEESE (Mahipal, Eva, Bindu, Prasad)	122	Small Minivet
SECOND	EAGLES (Asif, Ashwin, Siddharth, Hemant)	118	Bar-headed Goose
THIRD	FALCONS (Prashant, Suryatej, Manjoy, Guru Raju)	105	Pheasant-tailed Jacana

Collation of all the figures showed that a total of **182** bird species were seen during the race.

In 2012, 204 species were spotted and 2013's tally was 194. The slight reduction in the figures this year may be due to the heavy, unseasonal rains a few weeks earlier, which may have dispersed the birds far and wide. ICRISAT, which is a haven for birds, was also not visited.

The winning teams were handed over their prizes by the Chief Guest. The concluding item was the vote of thanks, given by Surekha. Finally the participants and guests were treated to a sumptuous dinner, after which an unforgettable evening came to an end.



Siddarth (5 years), the youngest participant in the Bird Race
(Photo courtesy: Humayun Taher)

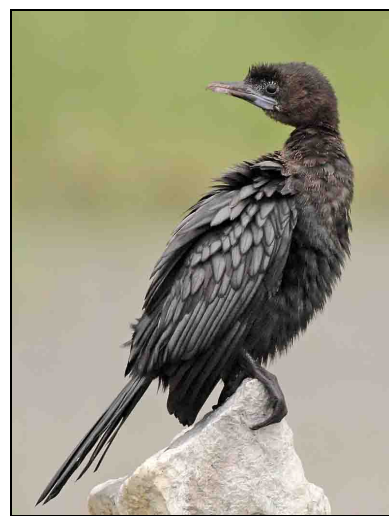
Some photos taken during the Bird Race:



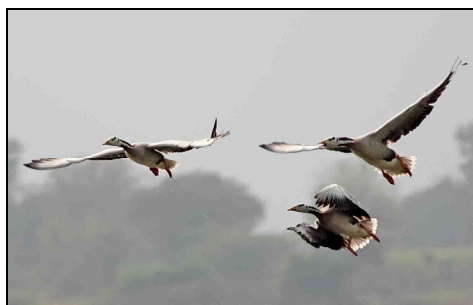
White-breasted Kingfisher



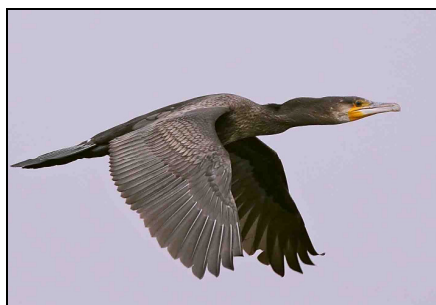
Oriental White-eye



Little Cormorant



Bar-headed Geese



Great Cormorant



Grey Heron



Indian Robin

(Photos: Hemant Kumar)



Ruddy Shelduck

Trip Report – Ananthagiri Hills Reserve Forest & Kotepally Reservoir, 23rd March 2014

Anjali Pande



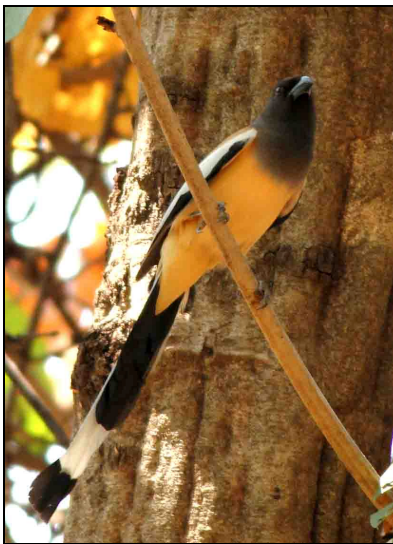
Plum-headed Parakeet female (Photo: Arji Ravi)

Some forests capture your imagination with their majestic grandeur. With their unfathomable treasure troves of flora and fauna, with their rich varieties of calls and silences, they make you realize how insignificant you are in the complicated web of life. And then there are other forests. Quiet little corners of warmth and friendship. They take you by hand unfolding their beautiful little secret corners to you, making you feel like a really privileged guest. You find all resident species here happily waiting to welcome you on each visit.

Ananthagiri is one such forest that makes you feel as if you are visiting an old friend. This welcoming little forest where the Musi river originates was the destination of our Sunday field trip on 23rd March. During the drive we saw Grey Francolins (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) out in the open feeding very close to the road. On our first stop at a small opening on the right side

of the road, we realized that it was going to be a hot day and that bird activity could be a bit on the moderate side.

We sighted White-bellied Drongo (*Edolius caeruleus*), Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*), Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*), Rufous Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*), Indian Black Robin (*Copsychus fulicatus*), Spotted Dove (*Spilopelia chinensis*), and Large Cuckooshrike (*Coracina macei*) here. There were calls of Coppersmith Barbets (*Xantholaema haemacephala*). Tough little Purple Sunbirds (*Cinnyris asiaticus*) were up and about, while two White-browed Wagtails (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*) walked around a puddle originating from a leaky water tank. We took a small walk through the scrub forest and saw Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*), Brahminy Starling (*Sturnia pagodarum*) and an Oriental Honey Buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*).



Rufous Treepie (Photo: Arji Ravi)



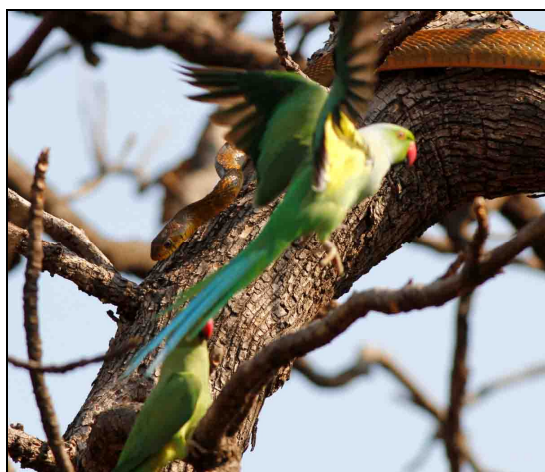
Rose-ringed Parakeet (Photo: Arji Ravi)

Announcing the arrival of summer, there were brilliant red-orange flowering trees of Flame of the Forest (*Butea monosperma*) everywhere. They provided a very dramatic backdrop throughout this birding trip as every few meters we could see a tree bursting into its flaming velvety blossoms! Also flowering in their extreme yellow were Tree of Gold (*Tabebuia aurea*) and along the road there were pleasant purple flowering giants Jacaranda (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*). It was a very beautiful landscape!

We carried on further on the way to Ananthagiri when a lucky group stopped to look at an Indian Grey Hornbill. As a bonus they got to see a tree full of Rose-ringed Parakeet nest holes. Here a Rat Snake was taking a hungry look inside each nest, setting off panic alarms in the Parakeet colony! Parakeets kept attacking the snake trying to lead him away. Our small group of birders watched this whole drama keenly and heaved a sigh of relief when at the end the snake decided to leave!



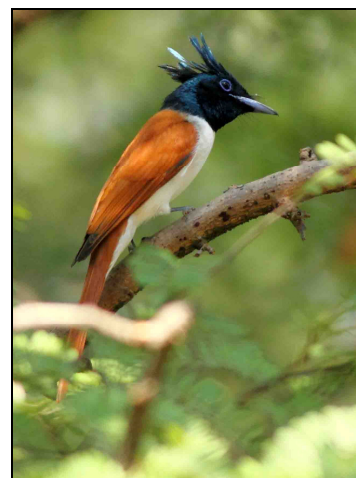
A Rat Snake visiting the Rose-ringed Parakeet nests
(Photo: Arji Ravi)



The Parakeets trying to chase the Rat Snake away
(Photo: Arji Ravi)

Finally arriving at the Ananthagiri Temple we decided to have breakfast as the day had already advanced and we were hungry after the drive. The spread that was laid out on car bonnets was impressive. Nothing was wanting! Right from fresh homemade idly and chutney, sandwiches and bananas to hot tea, we enjoyed our food break watching activities of a large number of very noisy Rose-ringed Parakeets. It was then time to start off for the forest.

Observing that the temple had a good number of visitors that day, we took the steps down to the tank. Watched by curious devotees, we started looking for an elusive Asian Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) who had just provided a glimpse! Surprisingly the hot day did not seem to have any effect on bird activity in the shade of big trees in the forest. In addition to the bright rufous coloured Paradise Flycatcher we immediately saw a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*), a White-browed Fantail (*Rhipidura aureola*) prancing around and a pair of Indian Blackbirds (*Turdus similimus*), followed by a gregarious gang of a few Yellow-billed Babbblers (*Turdoides affinis*).



Asian Paradise Flycatcher male
(Photo: Arji Ravi)



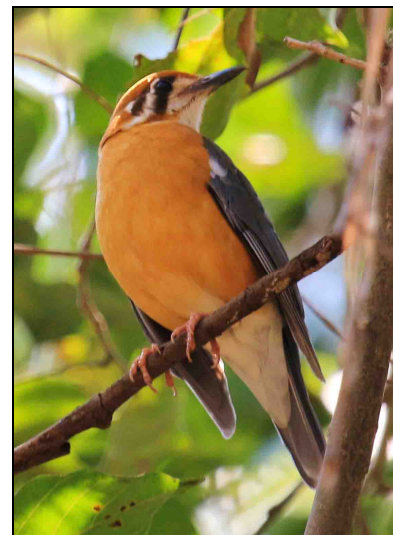
Asian Paradise Flycatcher female
(Photo: Kishore Bakshi)



Tickell's Blue Flycatcher
(Photo: Kishore Bakshi)



White-browed Fantail (Photo: Arji Ravi)



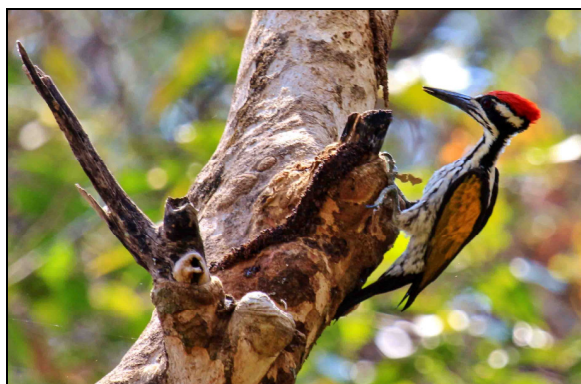
Orange-headed Thrush
(Photo: Kishore Bakshi)

Walking down the pathway under the cool shade of thick canopies of Mango (*Mangifera indica*), Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*), Pipal (*Ficus religiosa*), Banyan (*Ficus bengalensis*) and other giants, we took a right turn and hit a goldmine! There were many calls, lot of activity and some decidedly interesting looking mixed hunting parties. It was obvious, that we needed to spend time here! First one that got spotted was a male Blue-headed Rock-thrush (*Monticola cinclorhynchus*) sitting on a lonesome and lean tree. The bird was calling until the rest of the group of birders arrived; that's when he decided not to provide free-of-cost entertainment any more and became quiet. Interestingly a White-bellied Drongo continued to produce some melodious songs, mimicking species according to his liking!

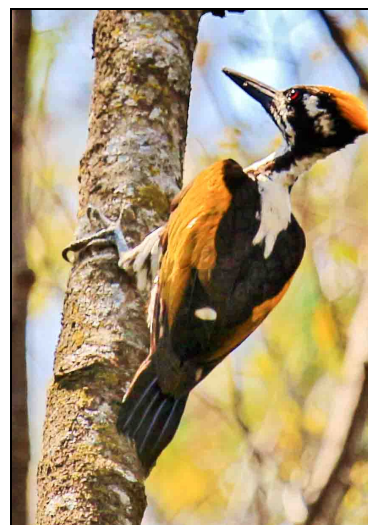
Scanning the canopy proved to be fruitful as we sighted Cinereous Tit (*Parus cinereus*), Small Minivets (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*) and White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) all hunting and singing together. Also spotted in this melee was Gold-fronted Leafbird (*Chloropsis aurifrons*), impressing us with its musical call. Back on the main path we were stopped in our tracks by an

Orange-headed Thrush (*Geokichla citrina*) who seemed to be unwilling to move even though his perch was uncomfortably close to the path. We watched him to our hearts content realizing then that he might actually be having some problem with his leg! Leaving him alone we moved forward along the tiny stream visible in some places running parallel to the path.

One characteristic feature found everywhere in this forest are the beautiful vine swings. And invariably these are the places where you encounter all different flycatchers. Typically under high canopies around thick vines that can be used as perches, flycatchers of all types can be seen catching insects. A pair of Asian Brown Flycatchers (*Muscicapa latirostris*) was sighted on one such vine swing area just as a female Blue-headed Rock Thrush busied herself hunting. There were sounds of pecking of tree trunks throughout the forest corresponding to which we had good sightings of Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*) and White-naped Flameback (*Chrysocolaptes festivus*) pairs. A Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos mahrattensis*) was also seen.



Black-rumped Flameback (Photo: Kishore Bakshi)



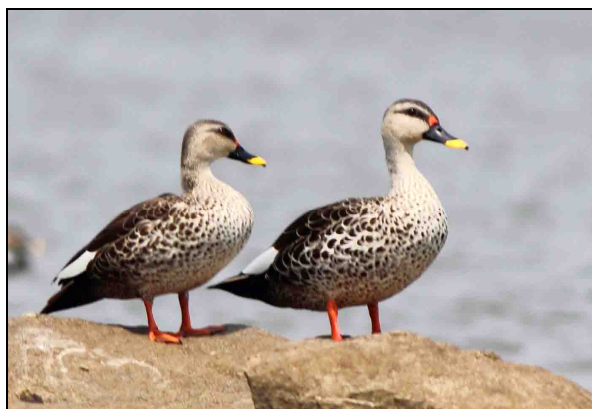
White-naped Flameback
(Photo: Kishore Bakshi)

When a white Paradise Flycatcher with streamers was sighted, our soothing stopover in the shade of a really huge Banyan tree changed into a place of frenzied excitement. We witnessed acrobatic arching of backs into some impossible angles as photographs were attempted with the bird merrily flitting from branch to branch right above our heads!

Slowly retracing our steps back we decided to move on to the next destination, Kotepally dam, also known as Nagasamudram reservoir. After a pleasant drive of about 20 Kms through beautiful ghat roads we came to this big lake to find migratory ducks and waders happily feeding. Relatively undisturbed it is a large lake with big rocks on the edges, good water level and shallow areas along the far end. We saw Garganey (*Querquedula querquedula*), Common Teal (*Anas crecca*), Eurasian Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*), Northern Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*), Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) and Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*). We were happy to add a group of Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*) to our list as well.



Wood Sandpiper (Photo: Kishore Bakshi)



Spot-billed Duck (Photo: Arji Ravi)

In addition to the ducks and geese, we spotted Kentish Plovers (*Charadrius a. alexandrinus*) and Little Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius dubius jerdoni*), Wood Sandpipers (*Tringa glareola*), Green Sandpipers (*Tringa ochropus*) and Common Sandpipers (*Actitis hypoleucos*) rounding off the list of migrants with the brilliant yellow-coloured Citrine Wagtails (*Motacilla c.*

citreola). There were Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*), River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*) and Little Terns (*Sternula albifrons pusilla/sinensis*).



Red-wattled Lapwing (Photo: Arji Ravi)

On the way out we saw a group of 5 Oriental Honey Buzzards soaring high and, while driving, Shafaat uncle spotted a very well-camouflaged Indian Stone-curlew (*Burhinus indicus*): The bird became conscious of our presence and decided to sit still on the ground like a nightjar. We all managed to see it because we knew where it was!



Indian Stone-curlew (Photo: Arji Ravi)

By now it was late afternoon so we decided to head back but not without having a good lunch to quell hunger after a long day of birding. We stopped at a roadside eatery. Wondering at the stamina of our hardy little new birder Tejaswini we tried to energize ourselves with a range of Biryanis. This turned out to be a pragmatic decision because after entering the city around 5 pm, by the time we got home it was already dinner time! A full day of great birding, good food and excellent company, what more could one ask for on an early summer outing to Ananthagiri!

Report – Indoor Meeting - Talk by Ms Anuradha Reddy - 12th March 2014

Surekha Aitabathula



Photo: Bharadwaj Korn

‘Application of Advanced Genetic Tools in Tiger Conservation’ was the topic of the lecture delivered by Ms Anuradha Reddy, Research Scientist with the Laboratory for Conservation of Endangered Species (LaCONES), an affiliate organisation of Center for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB).

Anuradha has done extensive research in ‘Tiger population estimation and genetic diversity study based on scat samples, employing DNA-based method’. She has worked in Ranthambore, Kawal, Pench, Panna and Satyamangalam Tiger Reserves.

The lecture was very informative and educative, and it was well-attended. We thank our friends from the German Centre for arranging a lot of extra chairs for the unprecedented number of young and old!

Beginning her lecture with the premise that the tiger being the flagship species, saving it, would mean saving the entire ecosystem, Anuradha said that we should tone down our obsession with counting tigers and start actually working towards conservation. She further informed that wherever prey density is good and its environs are undisturbed, the tiger sex ratio usually stands at 1 male to three to four females. If not, the tiger sex ratio goes askew.

A tiger’s gestation period is three months. Anuradha added that there is ongoing research to find out whether it is the female that decides her mate. There is higher tiger presence in Satyamangalam reserve forest, she informed.

Talking about the tiger dispersal pattern, Anuradha said that it has been found that related females settle down closer to each other whereas males do not have a similar correlation. Males found in a given range were not found to be related to each other.

Anuradha underlined the fact that pugmark identification method is now obsolete, but photographic capture method is successful vis-a-vis counting the numbers.

Touching upon her research profile of working on scat samples, Anuradha said that DNA degrades in a day due to exposure to sunlight, hence it is important for researchers to preserve the samples in the laboratory and prevent degradation. As the tiger and the leopard belong to the same genus, *panther*, researchers do encounter difficulties in differentiating one scat sample from the other.

The gathering at this lecture learnt that to protect the tiger:

1. Prey base should be improved and protected because when prey density increases, tiger population will also increase.
2. Grass quality for the prey base should be improved and cattle should be prevented from entering tiger country.
3. Animal-human conflict corridors should be identified and cleared of agriculture and human habitation.
4. Last but not the least, poaching activity should be stopped by coming down hard on it.

The Q & A session that followed the lecture was most enthusiastic with a volley of questions that the speaker fielded very well. It was a happy revelation to see that school kids had good knowledge about tiger conservation and they were willing to learn more.

The Asian Midwinter Waterfowl Census - 2014

Shafaat Ulla

Come January, it is time for counting water birds throughout our state. This year BSAP resolved to cover maximum number of wetlands, which required a large number of BSAP volunteers. Therefore, announcements were made through our Google group, inviting members to take part in the census work. About 27 members responded, and all were very enthusiastic to take up the counting exercise.

Census work is not only very interesting but also very educative and gives one a chance to improve skills in identifying different species, which can, at times, exceed two hundred in Andhra Pradesh. All the weekends during the month of January and the first week of February 2014, were, therefore, utilised for visiting various wetlands.

In and around Hyderabad we covered Osman Sagar, Himayat Sagar, Hussain Sagar, Ravalkole Tank, Ameenpur Lake, Fox Sagar, Shamirpet Lake, ICRISAT, etc. Smaller groups covered Narsapur Lake, Manjeera Barrage, Sangareddy Tank and Pocharam Lake.

One team went all the way to Srikakulam to cover Telineelapuram, Naupada swamps, followed by Kondakarla and Tadipudi lakes near Vishakhapatnam. Further south, Coringa mangroves and Uppalapadu community reserve were covered.

One team went all the way down south to Pulicat and Nelapattu sanctuaries, as also Tyda coastal area. The most important, Kolleru Lake, a Ramsar site, was also covered and surveyed comprehensively. For the first time we covered wetlands at Kawal WLS for the AWC.

We covered 39 wetlands with the help of 22 BSAP members. It may not be out of place to mention that we had some rare sightings like the Demoiselle Crane (*Anthropoides virgo*) and Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*) at Kaval, Western Reef Egret (*Egretta gularis*) at Osman Sagar and Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) at Pocharam.

The total number of birds counted were 5, 47,146, consisting of 111 species. Humayun meticulously and methodically collated the data, which was sent to Wetland International at Netherland and to BNHS at Mumbai. Both were very appreciative of the efforts put in by BSAP members in general and Humayun in particular.

In conclusion, we would like to place on record the immense help extended by the Forest Department and the respective DFOs/FROs and other forest officials, without whose help, such a comprehensive survey may not have been possible.

Bird Humour



(From Deccan Herald, 25-10-2012)

Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*)



Rock Pigeon adult (L) and young (R)

(Marredpally, 12-09-2010)

Order: Columbiformes

Family: Columbidae

Genus: *Columba*

Species: *C. livia*

Size: 29-37 cm

Description & distribution: The Rock Pigeon (also known as Blue Rock Pigeon or Rock Dove) is a member of the Columbidae family. It has a dark bluish-grey head, neck and chest, and the neck and wing feathers show glossy reddish-purple, greenish, yellowish or bluish iridescence. The bill is grey-black and has a prominent white or off-white cere on top. The irises are red, orange or golden with a pale inner ring, and there is bare bluish-grey skin around the eye. The feet are a striking purplish-red. A white lower back, and two black bars on pale grey wings are the distinctive identification features of the Rock Pigeon. It has a black band at the end of the tail, and the outer web of the tail feathers are white-edged. In flight the white underwings are conspicuous, and the light grey rump also shows well from above. Males and females are alike, though the female shows less intense iridescence on the neck, more restricted to the back and sides, and often absent on the breast. Young birds are duller in colour. The species includes domestic and feral populations of pigeons, which may vary widely in colouration.

The natural range of the Rock Pigeon is spread across west and south Europe, north Africa and south Asia, though it has spread (or has been introduced) to many other parts of the world. Originally found near the natural cliffs along coasts, it is now seen in a variety of habitats, including fields and grasslands, and

has also adapted well to urban areas, where fairly large groups may be seen on buildings, walls, statues or electric wires.

Behaviour: While it does pair up during the breeding season, the Rock Pigeon is usually gregarious and is often found in large groups. It is a strong flier - it is the swimming-like motions in flight that gave rise to the Genus name *Columba* (from the Greek *kolumbao*, which means dive, plunge or swim) - but may frequently glide, holding its wings in a very pronounced V-shape. It feeds individually or in flocks on the ground. It is capable of dipping its bill in water and drink continuously, but it is often seen sipping water and tilting its head back to swallow. It roosts communally at night.

Pigeons (especially the homing or carrier breeds) are known for their ability to find their way home across large distances, but still tend to not move far from their local areas.

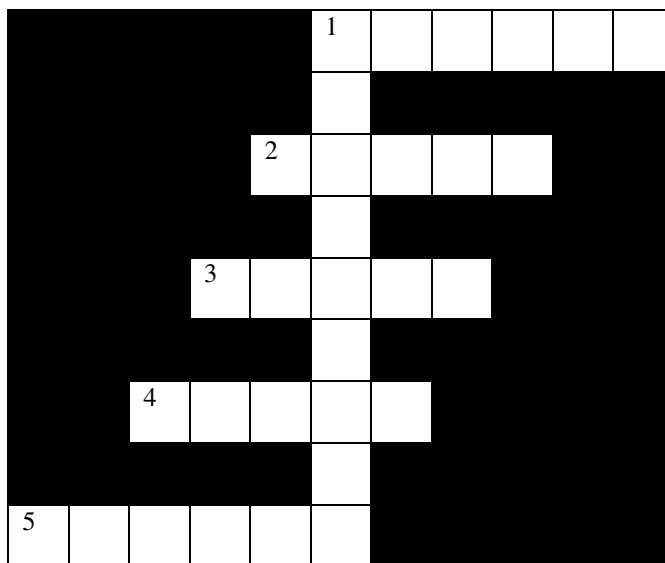
Nesting: The Rock Pigeon may breed at any time of the year, but peak breeding seasons are spring and summer. The nest is a flimsy platform of straw and sticks, laid on crevices in cliff faces or on ledges or other accessible spaces (like air-conditioner or exhaust fan vents) in walls and roofs of apartments or other buildings. The clutch consists of 2 white eggs. Incubation and feeding duties are shared by both parents, with the newly-hatched birds (called 'squabs') being fed by regurgitated 'crop milk' or 'pigeon milk' by both parents.

Local name: The Blue Rock Pigeon is known as 'kabutar' in Hindi and 'gudi pavrai', 'pavuram' or 'pavuramu' in Telugu.

BIRDING CROSSWORD #26

Umesh Mani

The answers to the clues given below are bird names or other birding-related terms. Let's see how many you can find!
(Solutions in next month's Pitta)



ACROSS

- 1 - Mira came to Tamil Nadu with this bird (6)
2 - Do these birds wear uniforms? (5)
3 - At least find these water birds! (5)
4 - Go a bit close to this bird (5)
5 - This wader will prove better left inside (6)

DOWN

- 1 - Mere grains I leave for this bird (9)

Solutions to Crossword #25 (Pitta, February 2014)

ACROSS: 1 – PIPIT, 3 - MONAL, 5 – BIRD PHOTOS, 6 – CRANE, 7 - WADER

DOWN: 2- PENGUIN, 4 – POCHARD

For Private Circulation Only

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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)